

This report as considered by the Children's and Youth Committee.

FOSTER CARER PAYMENTS AND ALLOWANCES FOR ACCOMMODATED CHILDREN

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 To advise the Committee of increases in the rates recommended by the National Foster Care Association (NFCA).
- 1.2 To request the Committee to agree the rates applicable in Milton Keynes for the financial year 2000/01.

2. Summary

- 2.1 There is a need to increase foster care payments, based on the recommendations made by NFCA. This will help the continued recruitment of carers in Milton Keynes and help to prevent carers moving to private agencies. Any increase in costs will have to be met from savings elsewhere, as there is no inflation provision.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 To recommend the Community Learning Committee on 4 April 2000 to adopt the revised rate, with effect from 2 April 2000.

4. **Background**

- 4.1 In the past the allowances paid to foster carers, children in residential care, family link carers and pre-trial carers have been linked to the rates recommended by the National Foster Care Association (NFCA). For 2000/01 the NFCA has increased its recommended rates by 4%. The revised rates are detailed in the **Annex** to this report.

5. **Issues and Choices**

- 5.1 The Committee's Budget which pays for these allowances totals £1,936k. This is made up of £1,742k for payments to foster carers, £77k for payments to children in residential care, £35k for payments to family link carers and £82k for payments to pre-trial carers. An increase of 4% represents an increase in these budgets of £77k. However, the Council at its Policy and Resources meeting in October agreed that no inflation provision would be made. The consequence of this is that any increase in costs here must be met from savings elsewhere, or a draw down from reserves.
- 5.2 The Committee will be aware that good progress has been made during the last year in recruiting foster carers in Milton Keynes. Not to increase the rates may have a destabilising effect on this process, which needs to be continued. The alternative to having an adequate supply of local foster carers is that children will be placed with external carers, which is often less appropriate in social care terms and certainly more expensive. The recommended increase of 4% in line with national rates is therefore consistent with this Committee's previous decisions to enhance local foster care provision.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Environmental

There are no environmental issues arising directly from this report. However, providing an attractive support package to carers will be important in ensuring that a maximum number of placements are made close to home. As well as the obvious social advantages of such a policy this will of course reduce travelling requirements and the environmentally damaging consequences of these.

6.2 Equalities

The rates as proposed aim to provide an equal degree of support to children and young people in the different types of care arrangement.

The service itself is aimed at raising the life chances of individuals who would otherwise be disadvantaged within society.

6.3 Financial

The additional cost of £77k of a 4% increase in fees is unbudgeted. However, not to increase the fees could well prove more expensive if the recruitment of local foster carers becomes more difficult and more expensive external placements are needed.

6.4 Legal

None.

6.5 Staff and Accommodation

None.

7. **Conclusions**

7.1 The increase in rates represents an increased spend of £77k in 2000/01, but this is required to allow an increase in line with national levels.

Background Papers: "Foster Care Finance" published by the National Foster Care Association